



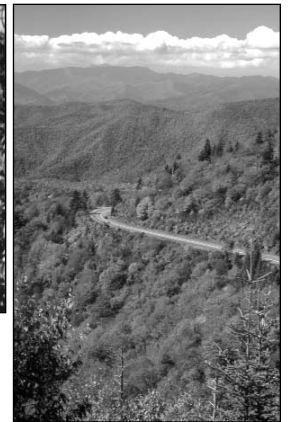
Blue Ridge Parkway News

Dear Neighbors and Visitors,

The year 2002 was a busy time for the Blue Ridge Parkway. In addition to the many daily challenges of managing this 469-mile-long park, the park staff continued helping develop the park's first General Management Plan. In 2002 the planning team traveled the parkway and region to talk with the public, collect information, and distribute newsletters. As a result of this effort we heard from hundreds of people, near and far. Many expressed very specific ideas and concerns about the parkway and its future. Thanks to each and every one of you who took time from your busy schedules to attend a meeting or drop us a line. Your input will be invaluable in helping us develop a plan that will make a lasting difference in the long-term management of this park

I encourage you to read this newsletter and find out what people are thinking and saying about the park and its future. Some of your input has helped us identify special topics for this newsletter. For example, we heard from many about recreational activities at Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, the crossing of Interstate 73 near Roanoke, and bicycling on the parkway. Hopefully, this newsletter can shed some light on these topics of concern. If you have any comments please feel free to contact us. We also have a project website and e-mail address for your convenience (see below).

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Timeframe for Planning

Just to review. . .

General management planning is the broadest level of decision making for national parks. Developing a vision for the park's future is the primary role of the general management plan – the plan will describe the resource and visitor experience conditions to be achieved during the next 20 years or so. Several possible visions for the park's future (called alternatives) will

be developed and analyzed before a preferred direction is selected.

Although it may be necessary in some cases to include some specific actions in the general management plan, most specific actions are identified in future implementation plans. For example, overall goals and conditions to be met by the park's interpretive and educational programs

will be established in the general management plan, but specific themes and required media or other facilities will be detailed in a subsequent interpretation plan. (This is why, as we discuss in the next section, some of your detailed comments and ideas may not be incorporated in the general management plan, but will be saved as input for future implementation plans.)

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Step and Timeframe	Planning Activity	Participation Opportunities
1 FALL 2001	Initiate Project- The planning team assembles, begins to identify the project's scope, customizes the planning process, and begins to establish contacts with participants.	
2 WINTER 2001-SUMMER 2002	Define Planning Context and Foundation- The team examines <i>WHY</i> the park was established and affirms the park's mission, purpose, and significance. Team members collect and analyze relevant data and public comments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read newsletters and send us comments • Help us build a mailing list
3 SUMMER 2002-SUMMER 2003	Develop and Evaluate Alternatives Using staff and public input, the team explores <i>WHAT</i> the park's future should look like and proposes a range of reasonable alternatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read newsletters and send us your ideas and comments • Come to public meetings
4 FALL 2003-FALL 2004	Prepare a Draft Document A draft general management plan and environmental impact statement is published. The draft document describes the alternatives and the impacts of implementing each. Based on the impacts and public input, a preferred alternative is identified in the document.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the draft plan and send us your ideas and comments
5 WINTER 2004-SUMMER 2005	Publish Final Document Based on review by the National Park Service and the public, the team revises the General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement and distributes a final plan. The plan is approved in a published Record of Decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the final plan, including NPS responses to substantive public comments and official letters.
6 SUMMER 2005 AND BEYOND	Implement the Approved Plan After the Record of Decision is issued, and as funding allows, the general management plan is implemented.	

What We Heard from You

When speaking of the Blue Ridge Parkway, almost the first statement out of a person's mouth is "I just love the parkway." National Park Service (NPS) employees working on the park's general management plan (GMP) have witnessed first-hand this love affair with the park at initial public meetings and through letters and e-mails. Comments and suggestions offered by hundreds of participants have provided NPS planners with important insights about what park visitors, neighboring landowners, county officials, science experts, and others expect from the general management plan.

The GMP team has enjoyed hearing and reading your thoughts, ideas, hopes, and concerns for the future of the Blue Ridge Parkway. We have learned a great deal and have been challenged and inspired by your thoughtful comments and willingness to share your feelings about this special place. Although space in this newsletter does not allow us to reiterate every comment we have received, we would like to share with you the most commonly held ideas and most frequently heard concerns and issues.

What do you particularly value about the Blue Ridge Parkway?

We have asked people to share with us those special values about the park that are most important to them. Not surprisingly, most people described the beauty of the views from and along the roadway. The natural setting of mountains and valleys, the peacefulness of rural and pastoral landscapes, and the dramatic high-elevation vistas were frequently highlighted. Some people also mentioned the importance of darkness that allows people to see the night skies.

The character of the parkway travel experience was also featured. Peace, solitude, leisure, freedom from traffic and speed, and the absence of commercial advertising were frequently mentioned as aspects of the parkway experience that are particularly valued. Some people said that the overall quality of the roadway and the beauty of its design are important to them, as are neat, clean, and well-maintained park facilities.

Protection of the park's natural environment, especially wildflowers and wildlife, is very important to many people. Migratory birds, high-eleva-

tion ecosystems, bog ecosystems, and old-growth trees are some of the features that were specifically mentioned. Likewise, many people value the protection and celebration of resources related to local history and heritage. Interpretation of park natural and cultural features and stories are also valued.

Ready access to recreational opportunities has a high value as well. Trails, both in the park and accessible from the park, were most frequently mentioned as important and valued recreational facilities.

What concerns do you have about the Blue Ridge Parkway that you believe the General Management Plan should address?

By far the most common concerns have to do with the increasing residential and commercial development adjacent to park boundaries and visible from the parkway. People are concerned with the loss of scenic quality and scenic variety. Some commenters believe that solutions lie with additional vegetation buffers. Others advocate a stronger land protection program on the part of the park, ranging from cooperative



Many Meetings... Many Places

In the past year the planning team has met with park employees and members of the public, including a variety of agencies and partner organizations, to find out what issues, concerns, and ideas people have about the Blue Ridge Parkway's future. The following is a list of publics the team has met with to date.

County and Regional Planners Meetings (November 2001) – Staunton, Roanoke, Little Switzerland, Asheville

Blue Ridge Parkway Staff Meetings (December 2001) – Montebello, Peaks of Otter, Vinton, Rocky Knob, Park Headquarters/Asheville, Sandy Flats, Oteen, Balsam Gap

Parkway Partner Organizations (January 2002) – Park Headquarters/Asheville

Parkway District Rangers Meeting (January 2002) – Park Headquarters/Asheville

North Carolina State & Federal Agencies (January 2002) – Park Headquarters/Asheville

Virginia State & Federal Agencies (April 2002) – Vinton, Virginia

Cultural, Natural, & Transportation Resource Experts Workshops (April 2002) – Jonesville, North Carolina

County and Regional Planners Meetings (August 2002) – Staunton, Roanoke, Boone and Asheville

General Public Open Houses (September 2002) – Staunton, Roanoke, Boone, Asheville

agreements to purchase of scenic easements to full purchase of lands.

Another area of much discussion is the relationship between the park and surrounding communities. Many commenters encourage increased communication and cooperation between the parkway and surrounding jurisdictions, emphasizing the potential for better land use planning and watershed protection that could result. Some comments favor local governments assuming more responsibility for park protection and others recommend that the park, take an active role in marketing commercial services located in nearby communities.

The design and character of the parkway itself also inspired comments. Some people are concerned that budget limitations and changing public expectations and demands are compromising the original design concept of the parkway. Others believe that elements of parkway character, such as the absence of roadway striping, cause safety hazards. Some people would like to see development of additional pullouts and overlooks; others believe there are already too many and that existing pullouts should be evaluated for safety, purpose, and appropriateness. Many commenters are concerned about overlooks and views being obscured by vegetation, and some are concerned about potholes. Some concern was expressed about the number of roads that access and cross the parkway.

Attitudes about the park are a source of concern. Many commenters expressed frustration that some neighbors and visitors do not understand the purpose of the Blue Ridge Parkway and do not realize that the parkway is a unit of the national park system, and is therefore subject to the same mission, laws, regulations, and policies as other national park system units. Some believe this is a marketing problem, some believe the problem is a result of changing public expectations, and

some believe the problem is complicated by the differing missions and regulations of the various agencies, including the National Park Service, who manage lands adjacent to the park.

Several issues were raised about how the parkway is used and what kinds of vehicles and activities are appropriate. Although most people seem to agree that cars, motorcycles, bicycles, and pedestrians all have their place on the parkway, some potential conflicts are of concern. Commenters noted that motorcycle noise, and in some cases excessive speed by motorcycle riders, is disturbing to them. Some people are concerned about the increasing size and number of recreational vehicles (RVs) on the parkway and believe some limits may be needed. Many mentioned that the parkway has too much commuter use that interferes with the slower pace and low traffic levels that are valued as part of a recreational experience. Commenters also mentioned that some special events held along the parkway may not be appropriate and sometimes result in visitor crowding.

Bicycling on the parkway is an issue of much discussion and a

variety of views. Some people advocate bike lanes along the full length of the parkway, while others believe this is not feasible and would inappropriately change the roadway's character. Other commenters advocate bike routes parallel to the roadway, either along the full distance or only in high-use areas. Some people commented that bicyclists do not live up to their responsibilities for safety, such as wearing helmets, using lights, and obeying traffic regulations. Other bicycling-related solutions range from periodic closure of the roadway to motorized vehicles, lowering speed limits to increase safety, and even eliminating bicycling on the roadway (please see special discussion on page 5). As a related issue, mountain biking on trails is supported by some people and opposed by others. Some people would like to see more trails in the park and some are particularly interested in more links to trails and greenway systems adjacent to the park.

Other recreational opportunities were discussed. Support was expressed for additional opportunities for winter use, including keeping more of the roadway open in the winter. Some people advocate additional rock climbing opportunities



and anticipate increases in demand for this kind of recreation. Hunter access at parkway overlooks is troubling to some visitors who believe that hunting activity is occurring too close to other recreational activities.

Because some campgrounds are either over- or underused, commenters suggested updating some campgrounds with showers and electrical hook-ups and/or enlarging some campgrounds. Others feel that such changes are not necessary and would alter the character of the campgrounds. Some people oppose any new facilities along the parkway, while others advocate some additional overlooks, trails, and support services so long as they harmonize with the parkway design. Many commenters suggested that additional travel information would be helpful to visitors. Several said they do not want the information conveyed by additional signs along the parkway.

Protection of parkway natural resources is a priority for many commenters. Concerns about air quality, poaching of animals and plants, and invasion of nonnative insects and diseases were highlighted. Some commenters thought that resource threats are increasing and suggested that park managers place more emphasis on resource protection in making management decisions.

Detailed Decisions

Many comments were about very specific suggestions or operational issues, such as increasing safety in work zones, modifying items for sale at concession outlets, and updating the park's website. Such comments are very useful and will be retained for consideration as park operational decisions are made and as detailed work plans and implementation plans are developed. Because general management plans focus on resource and visitor experience conditions to be achieved and overall management direction for the park for the next 15 to 20 years, this long-range plan will not address such detailed actions.

Some Issues of Special Note

There are always issues that arise in the early stages of GMP planning that need some clarification. For the parkway, three such issues have surfaced. They include bicycling on the parkway, mixing bike and horse use at Moses H. Cone Memorial Park in North Carolina, and stopping I-73 from crossing the park in Roanoke, Virginia. The people who have raised these issues are concerned about protecting recreational experiences offered by the park and about the importance of preserving scenic views.

Parkway Bicycling

Currently bicycling is only allowed on paved park roads, in campgrounds and picnic areas, and in parking areas. In the future, other routes can only be designated for bicycle use pursuant to the criteria and procedures contained in 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 4. That is, if it is determined *"that such use is consistent with the protection of a park area's natural, scenic and aesthetic values, safety considerations and management objectives and will not disturb wildlife or park resources."* As a part of the GMP process a comprehensive evaluation of on- and off-road biking, including special events, will be undertaken to determine if there is potential for new trails or routes that meet these CFR requirements. General management prescriptions related to bicycle use will be developed with public input and included in the general management plan.

Initial public comments also show concern that the National Park Service plans to eliminate all biking on the parkway. This is not true! There is much data to gather and evaluate before any proposals will be offered for public comment. Many ideas have been suggested for providing bicycling opportunities on the parkway; all options will be open for discussion and analysis through the GMP process.

Horse and Bike Use at Moses Cone Park

Blue Ridge Parkway staff are currently beginning a management plan for the Moses H. Cone Memorial Park in North Carolina. This plan will be separate from the parkwide general management plan, but will be carried out in a parallel process. Both planning projects will evaluate trail use related to bicycling and horseback riding, and any proposals for Moses Cone will be consistent with proposals made in the parkwide plan. Understandably, this has confused some of the people participating in or reading about the general management plan and those who are also concerned about horseback riding or hiking on Cone Park's carriage trails. Horse enthusiasts are concerned about mixing horseback riding and mountain biking on the Cone carriage trails. Cyclists want to explore the feasibility of opening carriage trails to bicycling. Any decisions on these issues are at least a year away, but in any case, the National Park Service will not consider mixing horseback riding and biking on trails at the same time because of safety concerns and potential effects on the quality of visitors' experiences.

Feel free to comment on either the general management plan or the Cone Park plan at any time. The planning teams will make sure the comments are considered in the appropriate plans!

Interstate 73

The Virginia Department of Transportation planned the routing for I-73 across the Blue Ridge Parkway. The National Park Service was consulted in that planning process and NPS comments were considered and incorporated in the plan. The crossing of I-73 is a decision that has been made. It cannot be reconsidered as a part of the parkway's general management plan. However, the management plan can assess the implications of the new crossing and make proposals to minimize negative effects on the parkway and parkway visitors. Additionally, the GMP process can and will consider requirements that must be met by state departments of transportation for future road construction or improvement proposals. Comments by the state departments of transportation and by the general public will be important in considering these future requirements.

The Purpose and Significance of the Blue Ridge Parkway

In our first newsletter (Spring 2002) we presented a set of draft purpose and significance statements for your review and comment. These statements, based on the park's legislation and analysis of its resources, capture the reasons Congress established the park and why this park is special and distinctive. Purpose and significance statements form a foundation for general management planning because any proposals considered in the plan must be consistent with them.

We received many comments that generally agreed with the draft statements, but we also received ideas for improving the statements. The

revised statements are presented here. Purpose and significance statements will not be finalized until the general management plan is

approved, so some evolution of them could still occur through the planning process.

Mission Statement

The Blue Ridge Parkway, in linking the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks, is dedicated to enhancing the outstanding scenic and recreational qualities of the corridor through which it passes, conserving unimpaired its significant natural and cultural resources, and promoting in perpetuity the public enjoyment and appreciation of the central and southern Appalachian mountains

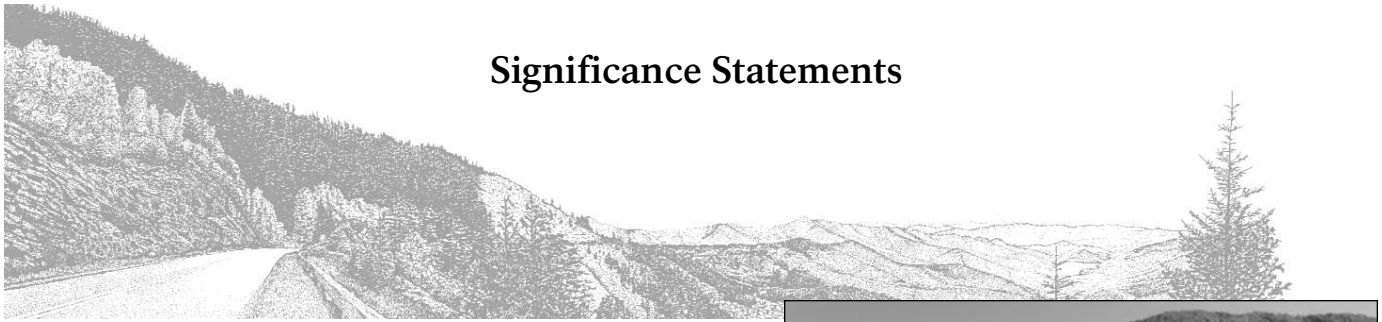
Purpose Statements

The legislated purpose of the Blue Ridge Parkway, under the act of June 30, 1936, is to link Shenandoah National Park in Virginia and Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee by way of a recreation-oriented motor road intended for public use and enjoyment. Under the provisions of the act, approved August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535), the intended purpose of the Blue Ridge Parkway is to conserve, interpret, and exhibit the unique natural and cultural resources of the central and southern Appalachian Mountains, as well as provide for leisure motor travel through a variety of environments.

The general interpretation of the park's purpose has been refined into the following more specific purpose statements:

- *Connect Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks by way of a "national rural parkway" – a destination and recreational motor road that passes through a variety of scenic ridge, mountainside, and pastoral farm landscapes.*
- *Conserve the scenery and preserve the natural and cultural resources of the parkway's designed and natural areas.*
- *Provide for public enjoyment and understanding of the natural resources and cultural heritage of the central and southern Appalachian Mountains.*
- *Provide opportunities for high-quality scenic and recreational experiences along the Blue Ridge Parkway and within the corridor through which it passes.*

Significance Statements



The route of the Blue Ridge Parkway follows mountain and valley landscapes to link Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks. Its location was selected to provide the best in a variety of scenic, historic, and natural features that evoke the regional image of the central and southern Appalachian Mountains. To maximize scenic views and give visitors the impression that they are in a park with boundaries to the horizon, the parkway was located in mountainous terrain that normal roads would have avoided.



The parkway extends 469 miles through the Blue Ridge, Black, Great Craggy, Great Balsam, and Plott Balsam Mountains. It is known for spectacular mountain and valley vistas, quiet pastoral scenes, sparkling waterfalls, colorful flowers and foliage, and interpretation of mountain history and culture. Designed for recreational driving, the parkway provides visitors with quiet, leisure travel, free from commercial traffic and the congestion of high-speed highways. As its All-American Road status indicates, it is one of the most diverse and high-quality recreational driving experiences in the world.

The following significance statements summarize the importance or distinctiveness of the resources along the parkway:

- *The Blue Ridge Parkway was the first national rural parkway to be conceived, designed, and constructed for a leisure-type driving experience. Its varied topography and numerous vista points offer easy public access to spectacular views of central and southern Appalachian rural landscapes and forested mountains.*
- *As an example of pre- and post-World War II automotive rural parkway design, the Blue Ridge Parkway retains the greatest degree of integrity of any parkway in the United States. The parkway is further recognized throughout the world as an international example of landscape and engineering design achievements with a roadway that lies easily on the land and blends into the landscape.*
- *The parkway is the highest and longest continuous route in the Appalachian area. Along its 469-mile length the parkway provides scenic access to crests and ridges of five major ranges within the central and southern Appalachian Mountains, encompassing geographic and vegetative zones that range from 649 feet at James River in Virginia to 6,047 feet at Richland Balsam in North Carolina.*
- *The park's uninterrupted corridor facilitates the protection of a diverse range of flora and fauna, including rare and endangered plant and animal species and globally imperiled natural communities.*
- *The park preserves and displays cultural landscapes and historic architecture characteristic of the central and southern Appalachian highlands.*
- *The Blue Ridge Parkway is a primary catalyst for promoting regional travel and tourism, serving as a unifying element for 29 counties through which it passes, engendering a shared regional identity, providing a common link of interest, and being a major contributor to regional economic vitality.*

What's Coming Next?



NPS policy requires general management plans to describe specific “management prescriptions” for each particular area of a park. Management prescriptions describe desired resource conditions and visitor experiences and include statements about the appropriate kinds and levels of management, use, and development in each prescription. These management prescriptions provide the foundation for all subsequent decision making in the park and are the core of the general management plan. To allow for a meaningful level of specificity, management prescriptions are applied either to different geographic areas in the park (management zones) or are applied parkwide. Most parks have both kinds of prescriptions.

The planning team is working on developing draft management prescriptions for the Blue Ridge Parkway. In a future newsletter you will have an opportunity to review and improve these draft prescriptions. Then the planning team will develop a range of possible future scenarios for the parkway by applying the prescriptions (zones) in different areas of the park. These scenarios (called “alternatives”) will be used to compare and contrast the consequences of making different decisions about the parkway’s future. Eventually, a preferred direction will be selected as the final plan. The preferred direction could be similar to one of the alternatives or could be entirely different. You will have opportunities to comment and contribute ideas along every step of the way.

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